

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Sanford Bishop announced that \$1.5 million has been made available to help southwest Georgia farmers conserve agricultural water supplies used for irrigation. The funding will enable farmers to build irrigation water catchments or reservoirs or make necessary improvements to existing reservoirs and provide technical assistance to the landowners. The funding also provides for maximizing the application efficiency of irrigation systems in the region.

"Our ability to secure these much needed funds is a testament to the good work that continues to be done at the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission," said Bishop. "By enabling our farmers to build and improve their water catchments and reservoirs we are giving them a distinct advantage in preventing drastic yield loss. I encourage Georgia farmers to take advantage of this very important program."

Applications for the program will be accepted between September 1 and September 30 of this year. The program, which is administered by the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission, provides financial assistance to landowners striving to conserve water on their operations. The reservoirs serve as water catchments that retain rainwater for irrigation purposes.

Providing such surface water solutions that utilize rainwater supplies decreases the demand for drilling wells into the aquifer. In addition, maximizing application efficiency of irrigation systems will enable farmers to more accurately irrigate crops.

"We are extremely grateful for Congressman Bishop's efforts on behalf of Georgia farmers," said Garland Thompson, Chairman of the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission. "The Commission looks forward to implementing this year's program and continuing to enable farmers to conserve irrigation supplies."

The funds are available as a cost-share agreement between the Conservation Commission and landowners. Landowners will provide 25 percent of the cost of the project, while the Conservation Commission will fund the remaining 75 percent, not to exceed \$50,000, of the estimated cost as determined by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Funding on a 75/25 percent basis is also available for making upgrades to irrigation systems in order to improve water application uniformity and to prevent off-site water application.

Applications and program information are available at the local office of the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission at 4334 Albany Hwy, Dawson or at USDA Service Centers in southwest Georgia. Please contact the Soil and Water Conservation Commission at (229) 995-6001 for a listing of counties eligible for the program. Applications received after September 30, 2004 will not be considered for the program.